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# *India Cultures*
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# INDIA CULTURES QUARTERLY

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# THE INDIA CULTURES QUARTERLY

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VOL. 16 FOURTH QUARTER 1958 NO. 4

## NOTICE

Foreign (outside India) readers are invited to become permanent subscribers to THE INDIA CULTURES QUARTERLY, which aims to record factual information of use to students interested in the cultures of India. Please note the low annual fee which has been adjusted to the cost price of printing and mailing, on a non-profit basis.

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Readers in India are advised that the subscription fee is Rs 2 for salaries of Rs 200 or less, and Rs 4 for salaries of Rs 201 or more. Note that henceforth Dr R. D. Immanuel will be in charge of editorial matters (as in the past), and Dr H. H. Presler will be responsible for the Mid-India feature and assisting with the business details.

# SKANDA CULT IN SOUTH INDIA

One of the most impressive sights that a foreigner gets when he visits South India is the weird dance of the frenzied worshipper who, with sharp nails pierced through the side walls of his mouth, carries a long pole called *kavadi*, decorated with peacock feathers. To the pole is attached a small vessel containing usually some honey or milk. This he takes to the temple at Tiruchendur, where the shrine is dedicated to Murugan or Skanda. The journey is to be undertaken with as many handicaps as possible. He usually walks the distance, and that too in the hottest part of the year and of the day, when the temperature rises over 105°. As he goes a large crowd follows him with drums beating and instruments playing, all set to martial music. He is overwrought with frenzy most of the time and dances and jumps. Some times out of sheer exhaustion he falls to the ground. Most of the time his emotions are so strong that he does not know what he is doing. He handles naked fire and apparently is unhurt. Such arduous undertakings are made in payment of vows made to God Skanda. People pray that in case they recover from a sickness, they would give him an offering and they do it in this way. This is only an example of the worship of Skanda.

The Skanda cult is very popular in South India and its deity has probably more devotees down there than any other sectarian god. The Tamil name for Skanda is *Murugan*. Of course, the Skanda cult is joined with Saiva religion and their connection is so intricate and intriguing that it is difficult to draw a line.

Some writers like K. R. Venkataraman think that 'one of the oldest Totem groups in South India was that of the Nagas (the serpent tribe) which must have later coalesced with that of the Murugan, for the appearance of a serpent is even today considered by the common folk as betokening the presence of Murugan'. (Cultural Heritage of India Vol. IV. p. 309). But as one reads Tamil literature, especially the poems of Nakirar, and Arunagiriar, the constant allusions are to Murugan's love-making to the hill tribe maiden, Valli.

Even now, the wandering Tamil tribe called Kurawar, consider Murugan their deity and some of the maidens call him by the affectionate term brother-in-law. Some of the best pieces of poetry in Tamil literature (and probably in all literature), are the idyllic poems describing the simple beautiful lives of those mountain people whose daughter the god Skanda married. One type of such idyllic poems is called in Tamil, Kuravanchi. Simple in diction and elevating in thought they are really entrancing. Somewhere about the seventeenth century A.D. a poet by the name of Kumarakurupara wrote of Skanda's love in a poem called Kuttalam Kuravanchi. Kuttalam is a famous hill-station in South India, noted for its several waterfalls and the poet depicts in a chaste way, the transcendent love of Skanda and the following of the mountain people. His poems were so attractive (for they were poetry of excellent nature) that he became famous almost over-night.

The Christian Tamil poet, Vedanayaga Shastriar, saw in the success of these poems a key to express his own talents and so composed what he called Bethlehem Kuravanchi. The comparison between the two goes deep. In the Hindu poem Skanda is called Son of God. The Christian poet had nothing to belabour about this point. The Hindu son of God marries the mountain maiden Valli. The Christian poet discribes in beautiful language the marriage of the daughter of Zion (the church). The simple innocent lives of the mountaineers find their counterpart in the life of man in the garden of Eden before the fall. John the Baptist is the one who is the official announcer of the bride-groom (one of the customs of the Kurava tribe) etc. Shastriar's fame began to spread soon after he wrote Bethlehem Kuravanchi and he was accepted by the Christians as a great hymn writer.

One sees in the Skanda cult a lot of syncretism. It has already been pointed out that the concept of the serpent totem was coalesced with Skanda. The second contributing factor is the coalition with Shaivaism. In the temples Skanda is sculptured as a boy, the off-spring of Shiva and Parvati. In fact he is called very often by the title, son of God (Kumara Kada vul). Mystic elements also have found their way into this cult. One of the names of this god is Arumugan, that is, 'six faces'. The mystics say that the first face drives out darkness by the light that comes out of it; the second gives favour to its votaries; the third protects sacrifices; the fourth gives the correct understanding of the self; the fifth destroys the forces of evil, especially spirits; and the sixth is the loving countenance he manifests to his beloved wife Valli, the mountain maiden. The strain of mysticism is also seen in the fact that he is said to live in the heart of his votaries.

Another name of Skanda is Kartikeyar, that is, the 'one nursed by krittika devis'. This is probably the nuclear element, to which the earlier religious concepts were joined. The story is that he was the child of Himavet, and that he was borne by the goddess of fire to the earth. Here he was nursed by the six Krittika devis.

One of the common names of people in South India is Velayutham. This word literally means the 'spear instrument'. In sculptures and pictures this is portrayed as a trident and in the vernacular languages it is called also 'trisul'. Skanda is called Velan in Tamil literature, that is, he who carries the trident. Even now, in some of the temples the fight and victory of Skanda over the demons is graphically dramatised; people enjoy seeing the idol of Skanda vanquishing the idol demons. At the dramatic moment of victory, people raise a triumphant shout of cheers; some fall down and worship the idol; others cry aloud with inexpressible emotions. The story of the drama is very simple. There was war between gods and demons. The demonic host was led by three brothers, Surapadman, Singamuhan and Tarakan. The story is often said to be an allegory by which the three brothers who represent ignorance, pride, and lust are conquered by the light of knowledge.

Hindu religion teaches theology in several ways, but one of the

important ways is by associated symbols. The following are some of the associated symbols in connection with Skanda. The first to be mentioned is the peacock. Skanda in this connection is called Mayil-vahan, which literally means 'the peacock rider'. The peacock is sign of beauty, glory, and majesty.

Another associated symbol of Skanda is the elephant, which signifies wisdom and activity. Wisdom is also symbolised by a jar of nectar. Many of the sculptures have either of these associated symbols.

A rosary or rudrakshamala represents asceticism especially in its teaching aspect. In some temples the Skanda idol has cinmudra (the gesture of communicating wisdom), a rosary and the spear. In this connection, K. R. Venkataraman says, "as Sivaguru or Swaminathan, there is a Tamil tradition that Skanda came to be called Swaminatha, the 'great lord', because he expounded to Siva, the significance of the Pranava. It will be of interest to compare this image of Swaminatha represented in Swamimalai as an elderly sage with a beard and two arms, with the peculiar iconographic Javanese concept of Bhattragura, sometimes called Sivagura identified by some scholars as Agastya. Could it be that this concept combines the Murugan and Agastya cults which are two distinct Tamil contributions to Javanese art and religion?" It is rather strange that Skanda is called an ascetic, because most of the stories connected with him are stories of love to Valli. He had also another wife by the name of Devasena. The mantra of Skanda is 'Om nama sivaya'.

All these are interpreted esoterically. Thus his wife valli is said to be his power of will or desire, the second wife Devasena represents his power of action, his spear is the power of knowledge which destroys ignorance.

The temples sacred to Skanda are situated in places of natural beauty. Some are at places near the sea, (e.g., the one at Tiruchendur) and others are on top of hills like the ones at Palni and Tirupurakundram near Madurai. Thus one sees that the popularity of the Skanda cult is due to the following influences:

1. Its eclecticism or synthesis of primitive tribal totemism, Dravidian Shaivaism, and Aryan Skanda story.
2. Its offer of deliverance and protection from sickness, pain and sorrow.
3. Its tinge of mysticism, which had a peculiar attraction.
4. Its esoteric interpretation of mythology.
5. Its dramatic way of worship.
6. Its association with tantra cult.

So it is no wonder that it has a very large number of votaries. But its very popularity has caused its enemies to envy and one of the indications is the saying, prevalent in the south, 'This fabrication of lies is not matched even by those found in Skanda Purana; is it?' However Skanda Purana is not one of the eighteen main Puranas and it is usually called a minor (upa) Purana.

# THE MID-INDIA REGION

By Dr Henry H. Presler

**Note:** This regular feature in The India Cultures Quarterly is contributed by the director of the Department of Organized Research of Leonard Theological College. The present series is entitled, 'Experiment in Oral Mythology'.
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This experiment with the oral mythology of a mid-India district is based entirely upon field work. From the hundreds of oral reports collected, myths illustrating local competitive behaviour are being examined. Hitherto unwritten, these manifestations of belief, attitude and resolution have been classified as follows:

### Actualizations

Descriptive of the contexts, types and procedures of this-world and local competition between humans only, revealing the societal pattern for inter-personal struggles.

### Symbolizations

Descriptive of competition among humans into which supernatural beings are inserted as sharing the same values and expectations that characterize human wrangling.

### Projections

Descriptive of competition confined to the acts of divinities, in which the cultural norm for humans is the same for the gods, but embellished by the powers and characteristics attributed to the gods. It is essential to stress the absence of any myths containing any other than human patterns for divine behaviour; the possibility of such a variant pattern is recognized, but during the past ten years no trace of such has been found by us here.

The writer began this experiment prepared to let any evidences weaken or destroy the hypothesis in his mind, to wit: *That oral mythology in this mid-India region arises out of the actual experience of humans, whether its characters be humans, or both humans and divinities, or only divinities.* As the analysis draws to a close, he has failed to discover negative evidences. How to account for the identity of behavioural pattern for humans and divinities? One may avail himself of certain psychological, sociological or anthropological theories; but there is always the danger that a theory developed out of different field work data, may rush the investigator ahead of his own data. Therefore, I am now concerned merely to report a suspicion that the skeleton of local 'projection' myths of competition is the cultural pattern among local humans.

In previous issues we have printed examples of Actualizations and Symbolizations; we turn here to Projections, and begin with myths projected out of the prolonged struggle between the Aryans and the aboriginals, beginning about 2000 B.C. and continuing in the present. The Aryan version is given in the Rig, Sama, Yajur Vedas, in the Brahmanas, the Ramayana of Valmiki, as among the scriptures, and in certain modern publications of a secular nature. The aboriginal version is found in the Atharva Veda, portions of the Mahabharata and Itihasas, illustrating another class of scriptures, and also in other modern and secular publications. The Aryan vs Aboriginal contest has been the major physical, racial and cultural strife of the last four thousand years of India's history, and thousands of myths have been generated by the tensions.

The actual struggle has been real, this-worldly, bloody; as such it has produced 'actualizations'. The strife has been, at times, beyond human endurance, requiring the assistance of other-than-human resources; with the appearance of divine assistants, 'symbolizations' have been created. Finally, the as yet unresolved differences have been given an eternal aspect by projecting them into the realm of supernatural beings. Much of the written literature, therefore, deals with this historic contention as if it were a heavenly rather than an earthly affair. Anthropologists have found evidences for believing that the 'gods' in such documents were outstanding personalities and warriors of the Aryans, and the 'demons'[1] were the same among the aboriginals. The techniques of historical criticism tend to confirm such definitions. Further, the actors are generally Aryan; the female actors, aboriginals. In what follows, I am taking these identifications and sexes as established. However, one should remember that the average reader of the sacred documents, and listener or narrator of the oral report, has no such definitions in his mind. He or she takes the oral projection to be an account of competition between supernatural agents.

The myths pertaining to this continuing fight may be classified as follows:

A. Demons against demons (strife within the demon camp)

B. Demons vs. gods
   1. Demons defeat the gods
   2. Demons deny their kind and help the gods (stoogies)
   3. Gods defeat the demons

[1] The word " demon" is an unsatisfactory English substitute for the original, but perhaps the nearest word available. The reader with English as his mothertongue, should divest his mind of western definitions of the word "demon." In this mid-India culture a demon is not necessarily wicked, troublesome, or malformed. He does not belong to a lesser order of the supernatural, and is equal to slaying a god. That the gods (Aryans) looked upon the aboriginals (demons) with contempt, and attributed horrific characteristics to them, is admitted, but this is no different than the propaganda of modern warfare. The demons are to be defined as respectable supernatural beings, many of whom had admirable qualities; unfortunately for them, they have lost all major encounters up to the present.

C. Gods against gods (strife within the gods' camp)

The oral tales about to be sampled fall into one or other of the above categories. There are other possibilities (as the gods deserting to the side of the demons), but no myths for such hypothetical behaviour have been heard by us. This suggests that to *the victor belongs the myth.* The ultimate victors were the gods, though minor contests were won by the demons.

## A. Demons against Demons

Most classifications contain borderline cases; our first category starts with a myth bordering on nature worship. The divinities are a sacred river and the ocean (the sentiments of our informants are respected by withholding the real names of the divine beings. The scientific nature of our investigation is unaffected by proper names. Local myths are but samples of myths throughout human society. We are concerned to discover the nature of myth-making, not to write a descriptive monograph of local oral mythology. But the scientific aim cannot be realized without an exhausitve knowledge of the total local configuration).

I maintain this first example is aboriginal on the following grounds: (1) It arose in the forests of mid-India, far from Aryan operations. (2) Its main character is female. (3) An aboriginal tribe has inhabited the locale for at least nine centuries. The myth conforms to the topography of the present river valley, and to the course of the stream at the places mentioned. The flight and fight of the demoness recall to the writer pictorial memories of the locations named.

### What Happened to the Obnoxious Demon Suitors?

River X— is the daughter of Demon Y—. She is virgin up till now. Many attempts were made to get her married, but she thwarted all. When she was coming from Z— mountain about thirty miles west of AB Station, she decided to come directly to C—, district D,— mid-India. The king of C— saw her and invited her to stop over; she did so. The king saw that she belonged to a good demon family, and was young and beautiful. So he adopted her as his daughter. Thus, River X — resided there at C —. But on coming to know that her godfather was arranging a marriage, she silently escaped along the side of C — fort, making a big circular curve.

Near about E—, in F— District, a male river, G—, who thought himself most powerful, approached her with a request for marriage. River X— was very annoyed, and kicked him. It is said that G— fell six miles away. At the place where the virgin River kicked G —, the river today is six miles wide.

As she approached great Ocean in the west, Ocean was much pleased to see a virgin river coming to him by herself. Ocean, wishing to marry her, sent his great waves with the beat of drums and music to bring her in procession. The situation was grave, with no way of escape. River X— saw the waves coming, and vanished before they could reach her. She cut the earth deep and became an underground river. She came up twelves miles from shore. Great bubbles rise as a fountain at the point in the sea where she appears again. Upon this, Ocean said: Since this virgin whom I wanted to marry is coming out and tearing at my own stomach, she cannot be my wife; let her be as my daugher. So River X— is still unmarried, pure and divine.

In the foregoing the dangerous reactions of a jungle maiden towards unwelcome suitors, are expanded to the divine river tearing at the vitals of the supernatural ocean. But the demoness behaviour is none other than the human behaviour of an aboriginal girl dealing with annoying men. The only difference is the dimension.

In the next myth, snake worship provides one demon, and a black leader is the other. In the description of their quarrel, the narrator reveals the aboriginal sense of inferiority for his darker hue. He takes refuge in this myth which assures him that his leader was once white like the Aryan. The main theme of the myth is: Demon against demon.

### The Defeat of the Snake Demon

Demon L— was playing with a small ball when a young boy. The ball went inside a cave in which the Snake Demon and his wife were staying. She said to L—; 'You are only a young boy. Go away from here and play.' But L— said, 'I will follow my ball inside the cave'. She said, 'You cannot enter and the ball cannot be given you because my husband, the Snake Demon, is sleeping; no one can disturb him now. If he gets up, you will be nowhere'. Annoyed at this Demon L— shouted to the Snake Demon to come out and take the consequences. Snake Demon did come out, with *phoonkar* (loud breathing) which was poisonous. Now until this time Demon L— was of fair complexion, but the poisonous breath of his opponent turned him black instantly. Since then our supernatural being has been black. Otherwise, he would have been white. Demon L— fell upon Snake Demon and vanquished him. As punishment Snake Demon was given the duty of supporting the earth. He supports it now, and sometimes shifts his position. Then huge and furious earthquakes ensue; we may give many other reasons for such, but this is really the reason.

Such divisions within the camp of the demons are reportedly few, as is the case within the camp of the gods. The bulk of the myths pertain to the major clash, Demons vs, Gods. The following samples illustrate the hypothesis mentioned above.

### B. 1 Demons Defeat Gods

We begin with a decisive, overt victory of a demoness over a god (no myth reported to us describes a group victory over the gods; demons won single encounters). The god has married a demoness, and after the first flush of love, the perpetual power struggle is resumed.

### Cultural Conditioning is Stronger than Love

The image of our demoness always has an open mouth and bloody tongue, a black skin, a garland of skulls, a bodiless head in one hand out of which blood is dripping, and a ferocious aspect. The reason is that she was a terrible fighter, and once was coming in great rage. Whoever crossed her path was destroyed. Accidentally her husband, god N—, met her. Blinded by fury, she did not recognise him, and killed him with one blow. He fell to the ground, and she stood on his chest, looking down in glee. Then it began to dawn on her that the corpse was that of her husband. She felt rather ashamed, and because of embarrassment stuck out her tongue (HHP note: The usual gesture compulsive in this culture). So that is why you see her now with her tongue sticking out.

[1] God N—was, according to my findings, originally an aboriginal product; but the Aryans took N— into their pantheon, and later generations have called N— a 'god', not a 'demon'. Thus, this case shades into the previous class. But we classify it here assuming that this myth arose after the proselytism of the conquerors.

Usually a demon did not get the better of his foe without trickery, magic, or some ruse. Such indispensables in the demon armory are admissions of the greater real power of the gods. In fact, the subdued populations of India have dealt with one conqueror after another by methods the superior power did not anticipate, and this sentence could be expanded into a book of fascinating history. The brute power of the strong has succumbed to the cleverness of the weak. I begin with two myths to illustrate how the weak demons overcame their impregnable foes.

## Arrows Are No Match for Disease

Once there were seven demonesses who were sisters. They came to where god M— was living and presumed on his hospitality. So god M— built a large house for them at his heavenly place, and all lived there. God M— used to provide them their food, and looked to their welfare and comfort. He visited them daily for these purposes. But the demonesses objected because he came at untimely occasions. They insisted that he make some signals from a distance before bursting in upon their undressed condition. So god M— promised, but this hurt his pride. He got tired of these demonesses. He thought, If they remain here for the rest of time, my days and nights will be spent in making arrangements for them. So he said, 'Why don't you girls go to the villages and cities of the humans, and do some good for them?' They replied, 'This is Kal Yug (the last evil epoch of the present world cycle), and it is hard to believe humans in this age. We would have to starve'. God M— said, 'No, they will look after you, worship you and provide you in offerings whatever you may need from them. Help them in their sicknesses and diseases'. The demonesses said, 'Ha! We know humans! In trouble they will make vows, they will promise to give a goat and even coconuts; but when the trouble is over, they will go back on their promises'. God M — said, 'In that case, you are free to bring back the same trouble or disease upon them once again'.

Thereupon, these demonesses agreed and now they have spread all over Hindusthan. They are greatly respected and worshipped. This went to their heads. So the strongest demoness came back to god M— and said, 'I want that you should also respect me and offer me sacrifices'. God M— retorted, 'Go back to the humans and live there'. He did not offer anything to her. She yelled, 'You don't know my power; therefore, you uttered such things against me'. She left his house.

But in the night she came again to god M — when he was sleeping and caught him. God M— got a high fever, and could not do anything. In the morning when god M— got out of bed and looked in the mirror, he saw five smallpox pustules on his visage. Thereupon he prayed to the demoness, and said, 'Oh honorable demoness! Now I acknowledge your power. Please leave me and I will give you a more suitable place for your dwelling. Go to the world, please, and I will cause all people of the earth, rich and poor, to worship you and offer sacrifices'. So from that time she left off troubling the gods, and came down to the world and stayed here. She visits almost all the houses, and everyone tried to please her with whatever she demands (DOR—)

But lest the reader should suppose that only the female of species demon, can outwit a god, here is a tale in which the weaker demon male gets the better fo the stronger god male. It is an old trick, whereby the fawning courtier makes away with the power of his dupe. Wary conquerors in India have insulated themselves from such dangers by refusing to have any social intercourse with the defeated (by the device

of caste or red fort or cantonment). But sooner or later the defeated insinuated themselves into the emotions of the victors, and brought about their downfall. As on earth, so in heaven:

### Beware of Him Who Worships Your Feet!

You want to know how this demon animal came to be worshipped? Well, I'll just tell you. You see, he was a strong follower of god K—, who was none other than very God incarnate. It happened that god K— was having to fight demon I—, who was exceedingly powerful. As a matter of fact, demon I— had been able to defeat almost all the gods and goddesses. So god K— was afraid of him. It was then that demon Animal came and offered his help, and god K— took courage. Between the two of them they finished demon I—. Then god K— asked demon Animal to request some boon. But demon Animal feigned to be a devout disciple of god K—, and said, 'What I did was nothing. Just give me a small blessing, to wit, let me be always near thee at thy divine feet'. Demon Animal was, however, more intelligent than god K— thought. God K— supposed demon Animal was submitting to him, and had no suspicion that reallly his divinity was being milked away. Therefore, god K— granted this boon. What happened? People who worshipped god K— also began to worship demon Animal, always at the god's feet. Animal's devotion won their hearts. (DOR—)

And I add one fact that the informant did not know: namely, that statistically we have shown there to be eleven demon Animal temples to one god K— temple in our city alone!

A moment ago I said that the conquerors have been wary of the simpering prostrations of the defeated, and have erected insuperable physical, social and psychological barriers against them. Whereupon, the defeated have used these very barriers to turn the tables, as the following unsavory myth shows. But in this case the gods were equal to the emergency.

### How the Demons used their Degradation for a Temporary Victory

You see, whenever things get bad on earth, the very God incarnates himself and comes down here to correct the situation. The form of the incarnation depends on circumstances. For instance, take the trouble caused by demon O—. He was a really bad demon, and stole away this earth and took it into his house. He fortified his house with faeces, presuming that no gods would think of touching filth. Then he settled back and said, Since very God is highest caste, he can't get incarnated in any form to take the earth away from me; because, how can highest caste touch faeces? Thus, for a time, demon O — was in control of the earth. But very God thought of a way out, and incarnated as a swine, to root out and a push away the faeces. The swine burst into the house of demon O— and, grabbing the earth in his jaws, made off with it. So in this way the gods got back their control of the earth. Very God is always ready to help His worshippers in everyway.

In the foregoing myths the occasional victories of the aborigines are catapulted into the higher realm of divine beings and rendered eternal. These 'eternal' victories, however, hold the mirror to the competitive pattern among local humans.

## B. 2 Demons Help the Gods (Stoogies)

We turn our attention, next, to an instance in which aboriginals deserted their kind and went over to the Aryans (a procedure copied many times to the benefit of subsequent conquerors).

### How the Demon Wife of a God Deserted to His Side

We do not know about the time, perhaps it was in the beginning of the world. The gods were not strong enough somewhere, maybe in the heavens. Unfortunately, in their weakness they had to fight a battle with the demons. The demons were overcoming the gods. The heavens wondered what was going to happen. All sorts of bad signs occured. Strong, black, dusty wind storms were blown by the demons. There was no possibility of the gods winning. Someone went and told demoness P— that almost all the gods, including her husband, were wounded and were being defeated by the cruel demons. Demoness P—, by the way, is the one in charge of death. She said, 'I wish I had known it earlier'. However, she arose from her seat and blew some air out of her mouth. Immediately the demons began to die on the battlefields, in fifties and hundreds. Everywhere the demons fell. Thus, the gods were enabled to overcome the demons.

It requires but a little perception to recognize in the foregoing traitorous demoness the human example.

## B. 3 Gods Defeat Demons

The class containing the largest number of myths relates the victories of the gods over the demons, i.e., of the Aryans over the aborignes. In an extremity the gods had recourse to magic.

### How Magic Saved the Day of the Gods

Once there was a conflict between the gods and the demons. The latter were so powerful that they defeated the gods very easily, and conquered *swarg puri* (heaven). They made the gods and goddesses their servants. The king of the gods was made to be the washerman to the demons. The next in rank was appointed gate keeper at the royal palace of the demons. Thus, all the gods and goddesses were given some work or other[1]. The gods councilled with one another in secret as to how to extricate themselves from this extremity, and decided upon Magic, who can do any kind of trick. They asked Magic to befool the demons, to become a woman just like the court dancer of the demons, and to perform before their captors daily. (By this ruse the gods got access to the court, from which they had been shut out by their several menial jobs). After some days the king of the demons became suspicious about this dancer, and summoned her to his court. Magic was afraid to go, believing she would have to suffer a lot. But the god at the gate said that the days of their slavery were nearly over, and that all the gods should be ready for the day of the hearing. That day came and Magic went to court, being blessed by the gatekeeping god. So now the stage was set: a friend was in the court room, and a god was at the front gate. Magic was full of might and vigour, because she had the gate-keeping god's weapon hidden on her person.

The demon king demanded to know the root of the matter. Magic stated boldly that she is a goddess, and all goddesses should be worshiped as mothers. The king was in a rage and ordered her to prison. But Magic took out the weapon and with one stroke slaughtered the demon king. Then she began to kill the demons; the gods burst into the court room, and completed the carnage So the gods got the victory in the end.

[1] Which probably happened in reverse to the aborignees on earth.

The foregoing myth is transparently human in its behavioral pattern. The following one hints that the gods reached the pinnacle due to trickery, also a quite human device.

### How the Gods Became Immortal

Once there was a great conflict between the gods and the demons as to which part of the creation each would occupy. The demons were ferocious and very strong, whereas the gods were mindful of their moral character, being kind and merciful to one another. So the gods said, 'Let some impartial judge distribute the creation'. They asked the sea to make the division properly But the sea was afraid of the demons, and said, 'You churn me with the snake as string, and with the Q — hills as rod. So the gods and the demons began to churn the sea with the help of the string of snake and the rod of hills. The first solid something out of the churning was the goddess of riches. Then came out a huge white elephant. Then came out many precious jewels and wonderful things. At last came out a jar of nectar (amrit). Until this time the demons were applying all their strength to the churning of the sea, and on seeing the jar of nectar, they asked the gods to divide the things between them and the other gods and goddesses. But god R — understood that if these demons should get a single drop of nectar, they would become immortal and none would be able to kill them. The demons would rule this world and heaven, and there would be much injustice. So god R — took the shape of a charming woman, and holding the jar of nectar in his hand began to distribute it to the gods first. The demons became angry, but seeing a beautiful woman they thought she would not dare to be unfair. As quickly as possible, god R — caused the gods to consume the last drop of nectar. Then the demons were furious and became violent, unsheathing their swords and falling upon the gods to kill them. But as the gods had drunk the amrit, so they could not be killed. Instead the gods slaughtered the demons but not all of them.

## C. Gods Against Gods

The victory of ancient Aryans in India has been challenged many times. One reason for their periodic weakness has been their own internal quarrels.

These dissensions have been projected heavenward, along with the previous behavioural patterns. Accordingly there are numerous myths recounting the gods' jealousy of one another. The following account explains why a local beauty spot seven miles from my office, is a place of pilgrimage.

### The God Who Swallows a Social Insult Must be Inferior

Once it happened that god T— sent an invitation to god S— and god U—. Both accepted the invitation and started with all their attendants for the dinner. But just as the invited guests came up to the gate, their host sent some orderlies to stop them, and to refuse admission. At this god U— was enraged and started to collect his army for battle. But god S— was obedient and submissive, because he knew about the powers of the unmannerly host. He forbade his friend, god U—, to proceed with military operations, and made him go to host god T— to ask pardon for even thinking of war. The overbearing host god retorted, 'You go tell god S— that he is guilty of the murder of a high caste man, and cannot enter my gates unless he does penance for full one hundred years. Only then will his sin be forgiven: otherwise he will go straight to torment'. On receiving this message, god S — submitted and came here to our famous ghat, at WW—, and sat there in repentance for a hundred years until his sin was washed away. This shows that god T— is greater than god S— or god U —.

Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, even the queens of the gods. With all might in their hands at last, the gods fall foul of each other over a flower.

## Two Monarchs, Two Queens and One Flower Spell WOE!

The king of all the gods and goddesses had beautiful gardens containing different types of heavenly flowers. These gardens were especially preserved for his wife, goddess V—. He did not allow any other person except his wife to touch the flowers.

Now when god W — became king of a lesser state, he had as his queen a goddess named X—. One day goddess X—was boasting to her maids in waiting that her husband is[1] so powerful that he can give her anything she wants. One vixen laughed at her for saying so. Goddess X—exclaimed, 'Name any one thing that my husband, king W—, cannot give me'. The vixen answered, 'In the garden of the king of the gods there are flowers meant only for his wife. No other gods or goddesses may touch even one flower'. So goddess X—went to god W—and asked him to give her a flower from the garden of the king of the gods. Young god W—asked, 'How can I enter the precincts of the king of the gods?' So goddess X—went into a pout. She stopped eating and drinking, and god W—was worried much. At last, seeing the sorrowful mood of his queen, he promised her the flower, and boarded his chariot. Soon he reached the inviolable gardens, but there were guards at every gate. He rushed the first gate and slew the guards, and then the second and the third. The remaining guards ran away to the king of the gods, and said that a great hero had defeated them and was searching for a particular flower in the garden. So the king of the gods put on his armour and met the upstart in combat, only to fall before the strong arm of the younger god. So god W—plucked the flower and took it to his jealous queen. She was much pleased to receive the blossom to which only the queen of the king of the gods had any right. In her joy she asked her workmen to build a temple to her husband, and that may be seen today, still standing at Z—.

Persons familiar with the sites of former local palaces, and of their extensive gardens, may imagine the idyllic human setting for such a dispute. That such should have been foisted upon the gods, only illustrates my basic hypothesis, to wit: Oral mythology in this mid-India region arises out of the actual experience of humans, whether the characters in the tales be humans, or both humans and divinities, or divinities only. Whether this hypothesis be verified by the evidence in his own locale, the reader may judge.

[1] This tense is a literal reproduction of the Hindu idiom.

# THE UPANISHADS—CHANDOGYA

## (A Meditation)

By Dr Anjilvel V. Matthew

### 1. Growth in spiritual life

Sa haparani panchavarshani uvasa. Tani ekasatam sampeth u rethat yat ahur ekasatam ha vai varshani Maghavan Prajapatau brahmacharyam uvasa. Chandogya, 8:11:3

'He lived there for another five years. That makes one hundred and one years and so people say, Maghavan (Indra) lived one hundred and one years with Prajapati as a brahmachari.'

The reference is to the story that the leader of the gods and the leader of the asuras (Indra and Virochana) went at the same time to Prajapati to know the way of self-realization. Prajapati told them both to live with him for thirty-two years. At the end of this period Prajapati initiated them both in the knowledge, but indicated to them only a first step to true knowledge. Both went away satisfied. But Indra, even before he reached home, thought that what he had heard (in this study we are not entering into the details of Prajapati's teaching) was not satisfying enough. So he returned to Prajapati, who told him to live with him for another thirty-two years. At the end of this second period of thirty-two years Prajapati introduced him to another stage of realization. Indra went away satisfied for the time being. Before, however, he reached home, he again felt that he had not yet got the truth. Again, Indra was told to live with Prajapati for another (a third stretch of) thirty-two years. Going away a third time, Indra still felt that he had still not attained true realization. So he turned to the teacher of the gods a fourth time. Then Prajapati said, 'Live here for five more years'. And afterwards Indra had true realization.

What we find in this story is another instance of the Upanishadic insistence that self-realization cannot be attained in a day. Some Christian people ask their neighbours when they were saved, and expect that the answer should be given with an actual date and a precise hour. In a way, a life-commitment is made by a person when he accepts Jesus Christ as his personal saviour, and many people can tell you when they opened the doors of their heart for Christ to come in. But it is a mistake to think that a beginning is all that matters, and that when a beginning is made there is final attainment of spiritual growth. This was not the point of view of St Paul. He could no doubt boldly declare the hour when he saw Christ face to face and accepted him as his Lord and Master. But Paul did not consider it to be the end of his spiritual quest. After he led a valiant life of faith for many years and accomplished much in his effort to extend the Kingdom of Christ —perhaps more than any other single person—he said with humility towards the end of his triumphant life: 'Not that I have already attained

this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained'. Philippians 3:12—16 (R.S.V.)

### 2. Nature teaches

> Brahma vid iva vai somya bhasi/ko nu tva anushashaset/ anye manushebhya iti ha pratijajne/bhagavastu-eva mey kame brooyat. Chandogya. 4:9:2.

'"Dear boy, you shine like a knower of Brahman; who is it that has instructed you?' Satyakama answered him, "People other than men. But I wish, revered sir, that you would expound it to me'". (Translation, Swami Swahananda).

Satyakama Jabala holds an important place among the characters mentioned in the Chandogya Upanishad. Though Satyakama was a boy of unknown lineage, he was accepted as disciple by Gautama, son of Haridrumat. The latter set him to work as a cattle-herd. Gautama entrusted to him four hundred thin and weak head of cattle and told him to look after them. He went to the forest, telling himself that he would return only after the four hundred cattle had increased to one thousand. When in the course of a few years they had grown into this number, one of the bulls said to him. 'take us to the home of the teacher (acharya-kulam)'. The bull himself then taught him of Brahman as prakashavan (radiant); and for further instruction directed him to agni who taught Satyakama of Brahman as ananthvan (the endless). Similarly the hamsa (swan) taught him of Brahma as jyotishman (effulgent); and madgu (water-bird) taught him of Brahman as *anayatanavan* (the home—the abode).

These teachings created a glow on the face of Satyakama. The acharya noticed it, and asked him who his teacher was. Satyakama said: 'Not any human being, Sir. But I pray that I may be further instructed by you.' It is remarkable that when in course of time Satyakama Jabala set up as a teacher he let one of his disciples Upakosala Kamalayana to be taught by sacrificial fires (of three kinds) before he (Satyakama) instructed him of the supreme Reality. The Upanishadic point of view, and it is the point of view of Hinduism of all times and of all schools, is that though nature may teach certain things, true knowledge should finally come from a guru and that only such knowledge is saddhistam (truly efficient).

Two kinds of knowledge are referred to in stories of this kind: the knowledge derived from nature, and knowledge communicated by a guru. The Upanishads stress that knowledge of the first kind should be supplemented and completed by the instruction of the guru. To

the Christian, this guru is Christ himself, working through his Holy Spirit. We do not accept the position that without a visible human guru ultimate truth cannot be grasped. The fact however remains that the guidance of a guru (a trusted senior friend or counsellor) is often of immense value. Such a counsellor communicates to us the truth of God, which is partly communicated through our own experience with people and with nature. Paul on his way to Damascus saw a flashing light and heard the voice of Christ. But the lesson of this experience was clarified to him when an earlier disciple 'Ananias' went to Paul and laid his hands on him and spoke to him of Christ. The importance of human agency is stressed in the institution of the Father Confessor in the Roman Catholic Church. Do we not see a reflection of the importance of the guru when, like the Roman Catholic Church, many Protestant and orthodox churches also lay stress on apostolic succession and the laying on of hands?

Let us also note that even in the Upanishads the guru's direction and teachings are found helpful only to those who lead a life of discipline and who are willing to learn from those educational and life-charging agencies that impinge on them in their everyday life. Let us recall that God spoke to Moses in the burning bush after the wilderness in which he lived and the flocks of sheep he tended had communicated their lessons to him for forty years. The very frustration of his hopes and aspirations led him to listen and follow when God spoke to him at last from the burning bush.

O Thou who manifests Thyself in diverse ways, may our life of communion with nature enable us to receive Thy message when Thou dost speak to us through natural agencies. We also pray for all those men and women who help others to receive Thy word revealed in Jesus Christ, our Lord. *Amen.*

(A New Translation by R. D. IMMANUEL)

## CHAPTER XII

### Equanimity

By equanimity is meant that dispassionate state of mind which has the same and even attitude alike towards friends, foes, and neighbours.

*Stanza* 1

*If a man walks dispassionately that one virtue alone can stand him in good stead.*

**Note:** 'Walks dispassionately' is a paraphrase. The word literaly means 'activity resulting from discrimination or intelligence'. The idea is that emotions like love or hate prejudice us in favour of or against others. So, actions must be governed by intelligence rather than emotion, if they are to be righteous or just.

*Stanza* 2

*The wealth of a righteous man (a man of equanimity) will not perish but will be lasting for his use and those of his children.*

*Stanza* 3

*Even if it should yield good results, wealth acquired through unrighteous methods should be given up that very day.*

**Note:** The construction used here is a condition contrary to fact. The basic assumption is that wealth acquired through unrighteous methods can never yield good results.

*Stanza* 4

*Whether they are righteous or not is known by the children they leave.*

**Note:** The word translated for children has two meanings. One is 'that which is left' or 'residue' and the other is of course children. Some commentators prefer the meaning residue and interpret this verse as the residue of karma, that is, the merit acquired by righteous deeds.

*Stanza* 5

*The glory of great people is to walk without deviation from (the ideals of) the mind never paying heed to the evil or good results an action may bring.*

**Note:** The Gita ideal of Nishkam Karma or action without desire for reward seems to have been accepted by the poet as an ethical postulate.

*Stanza* 6

*If a man has in his heart thoughts deviating from justice, let him know that he is going to perish.*

**Paraphrase:** Evil thought are indications of a pershing soul.

*Stanza* 7

*A righteous man's lack of wealth will not be called 'poverty' by great men.* cf., Luke 12:15 A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things he possesseth.

*Stanza* 8

*The glory of good men is to stand without prejudice to any one just as the pointer of a balance after appraising both sides shows the weight truly.*

*Stanza* 9

*Words will not be prejudiced if the heart is not prejudiced.*

*Stanza* 10

*True tradesmanship is treating other's possessions as one would do his own.*

**Note:** The general idea here seems to be, that the spirit of the true business man is to care as much for other's interest as he does for his own.

## Chapter XIII

### Self-Control

*Stanza* 1

*Self-control leads to the world of immortals. Lack of self-control leads to unbearable darkness.*

*Stanza* 2

*Let one guard self-control as a great treasure. There is no other great treasure for man.*

*Stanza* 3

*Self-control, with the knowledge that it avails, yields glorious results.*

*Stanza* 4

*The greatness of the man who exercises self-control in his condition exceeds even that of a mountain.*

**Note:** *in his condition.* This is generally taken to refer to married life. But it can be applied equally well to other conditions like those of Sannyas or brahmacharya.

*Stanza* 5

*Modesty befits all people. But to the wealthy, it is a real wealth.*

*Stanza* 6

*If in one birth, a man like a tortoise, is able to control 'his five senses' that ability will serve to protect him for seven births.*

**Note:** Some think that there is a reference to the three mystical numbers one, five, and seven in this stanza. The five senses are touch, taste, sight, smell, and audition.

*Stanza* 7

*Whatever a man may not guard, let him guard his tongue. If not he will get entangled in his words and suffer.*

*Stanza* 8

*A single mishap resulting from the evil words of a man changes all his good into evil.*

*Stanza* 9

*Wounds caused by fire heal; but not wounds made by tongue.*

*Stanza* 10

*Duty (Right conduct) will lead him who has conquered anger and has studied self control.*

## Chapter XIV

## Good Conduct

*Stanza* 1

*Good conduct gives glory. So, it must be desired more than life.*

*Stanza* 2

*Preserve and guard your conduct. Even if one attains perfection in discrimination, it is good conduct that avails.*

**Note:** According to this author, perfection in discrimination that is distinguishing the eternal from the transient, is a very important factor in getting release from the cycle of births and deaths.

*Stanza* 3

*Good conduct gives (respectability) to birth. But by evil conduct a man's birth status is lowered.*

*Stanza* 4

*A priest who forgets the scriptures can learn it again. But if he forgets his good conduct he looses (his ministry).*

*Stanza* 5

*The envious man does not increase in wealth, likewise the man, who has not good conduct, does not rise in esteem.*

**Note:** 'esteem' here refers to the status of the caste in which a man is born.

*Stanza* 6

*Knowing the evil consequences of lapses from good conduct, strong minded men will not depart from it.*

*Stanza* 7

*Good conduct brings reputation, while evil conduct showers caulmny.*

**Note:** Calumny is a false story. That is, evil conduct brings about more than its share of evil consequences.

*Stanza* 8

*Good conduct is the seed of gratitude whereas evil conduct always brings about pain.*

*Stanza* 9

*Even when it slips, the tongue of a man of good conduct cannot produce evil words.*

*Stanza* 10

*A man who is not able to adapt his conduct to social environments, though learned, is a fool.*

# INTRODUCING STRANGERS TO HINDUISM

Dr Henry H. Presler

## The Vedanta

A Vedantist is a person who has 'realized' the meaning of the basic Hindu world-view in his own experience. He should be a student of Sanskrit, the ancient and lucid language in which the Vedanta (meaning the 'end' or 'aim' or 'essence' of the Vedas) is expounded. To read so many scriptures in the basic Sanskrit takes a pair of extraordinary eyes, able to discern the tiny crooks and curves in the intricate lettering, and partly accounts for the hornrimmed spectacles on the noses of the Hindu Vedantist. Let us don the Vedantic spectacles and look at existence through them. We do not investigate whether their refraction is accurate, whether the prisms are coloured or clear, but merely satisfy a curiosity to see how the world looks through them.

### I

Well, there is the world and all that in it is: the ground under our feet, the rivers with their fish, the trees with their moss, the eagles in the sky, the moon, sun and stars. How did all this come to be? Was it created, or was it always in existence? The first problem in any religion is cosmology. The initial question asked by every child, is: 'Father, who made the world?' If we answer him saying, 'God made the world' . . . the child immediately enquires, 'Who, then, made God?' Now with the Vedantist's spectacles before our eyes, we perceive that it is easier to assume the semi-permanence of matter than to assume an act of a Creator who makes something out of nothing. The Vedanta holds that the universe is not a creation at all; its underlying source always was, and always is. The universe sometimes is and sometimes is not. The Vedantist likes to illustrate his meaning by the spider who causes his web to issue from himself and to remain for a moment, only to suck it back into his body again. The underlying reality, Brahman, emanates the universe from himself, allowing it to remain for an age, and then retrieves it into himself. Our home in space is not a creation; it is a temporary manifestation of the sport of Brahma, semi-permanent and deserving of no reliance whatever.

### II

Now saunter along the mountain path to have a closer look at this interesting web. You pause on the rim of a gorge, dropping down through a pine forest to the swift stream a thousand feet below. It is near to noon of a sunny day, and in the warm bright rays, hundreds of butterflies flutter here and there. How beautiful their wings, or are they beautiful? They do not stop to eat, nor drink. They proceed in one direction and then in another. Why? Are they enjoying them-

selves? Is any real enjoyment possible ? Do the butterflies know that their average life-span is twenty-four hours only? What is accomplished by their existence?

Then we lift our eyes to the snows of the Himalayas, to the ridge of the world. But they did not always constitute the ridge; once they were, at least parts of them, under the ocean, and later were thrust up; slowly they will wear away to the level of the plain. This pushing up and pulling down: what is the meaning of it? Kingdoms rise, empires fall; infants are born, old men die; what is the sense in it? What is the purpose back of this flux? By peering more intently through the Vedantist's spectacles we see the answer: It has no real meaning; there is no positive sense in it, and no purpose. To quote the Bhagavad Gita:

> Immutable is my productive power (sakti). I produce and reproduce, through all the cycles, the multitude of beings, without a determined aim. (ix. 8.)

This world has no more reality than a drama in which the actors play at make-believe. Of course, if you don't know that the show is only a show, then it seems terribly real and important. If you don't know you are dreaming, your nightmare frightens you; but after awaking you perceive that it was nothing, and is nothing. The same is the case with this passing farce: it is nothing. You may call it a mirage. It is deception, like the trick of a magician. It is illusory. In Vedantic terminology, it is a *maya.*

## III

Now turn towards the south where lie the flat plains of Hindusthan. There, five thousand feet below, are the cities built by the mighty Moghuls, who were Mohammedans; they said, and their descendants say, that we ought to lead a good life and so pass the Last Judgment. Now look to the east, at that mountain village on the steep; its sturdy climbers are animists, who say that unless doing thus and so, a man will suffer disaster. Here to the West is a Christian Church, whose missionaries insist that thus and thus is the very will of God. On these same peaks we meet Sikhs, Parsees, Buddhists occasionally, and so many groups who differ from all the others as to what constitutes morality and the prerequiste to salvation. The anthropologists have evidence to show that people everywhere disagree on the definition of righteousness, from the Eskimo son who slays his aged father to spare his last pains, to the South Pacific mother imploring her children to eat her corpse in order to conserve her vital forces, to the Jain monk who wears a cloth over his nose to prevent inhaling a gnat. What is right and what is wrong?

Put those Vedantic spectacles back on your nose. Do you now see that there are no such ultimate values as right and wrong? In the Absolute there is no mention of moral attributes, because He encompasses both the good and the bad. God is beyond morality. The

Vedantist has outgrown morality. In the beginning he found it useful in restraining his natural tendencies, so as to concentrate his mind. But at the entrance to the realm of ideas, he left it behind, and entered an intellectual sphere. Morality is, like a creeper, useful to a baby; but as soon as he can walk alone, the child ignores his creeper, and forgets it. The Way of Knowledge obtains the goal.

## IV

Well, then, what about the problem of evil? There is so much misery to be seen, so many people crying out in pain, such cruelty. Here for example, comes the Himalayan whistling thrush, called the *kastura*, with its prolonged and enchanting song; what joy this bird seems to lend to the day; but see him swoop down into our gorge and crush a butterfly in his beak; now he sits on a limb, devouring the struggling insect alive. What sort of a universe is this in which such good and evil are produced by the same bird? If God be omnipotent and good, why does He not prevent evil? Oh, the tears of a single day, how incalculable they are, what an extensive lake these tears could fill with their brine! Why, why? Ah, now we see more definitely: Evil is not ultimately real, either. God may be compared to a serpent and evil to its poison. The poison is a normal, healthy secretion; the serpent does not die of its poison, and the universe does not die of this so called 'evil'. What men designate as evil, is merely the opposition of the finite to the infinite. The infinite is, as it were, imprisoned in the shell of the finite; struggling to get free. Try to convince a butterfly coming out of its cacoon, that the splitting of its encasement is evil, and that it were better to remain in his prison! What you call pain and suffering is only progress towards liberation. Don't worry about a problem having no real existence.

## V

Now see who is coming along our mountain path, one of those enthusiasts. He must belong to the Semitic branch of the world's faiths, and be either a Zoroastrian or a Jew, a Christian or a Moslem, since such fellows often think their religion is the only true one.

Listen to this babbler, trying to proselytize us. Let us read one of his tracts, 'proving' his religion to be the final Truth. . . . Yes, what is written here is correct; he has hold on the final Truth.

Here comes another, and he makes the same claim for his faith. He, too, offers us a tract. Ah ha! He also is right; his religion is also the final Truth. May God bless both of these enthusiasts. Let them continue along their different paths, as along two spokes towards the common hub of the wheel.

As Mahatama Gandhi once said: 'It must be our daily prayer that every known religion of the world should grow from day to day, and should serve the whole of humanity!' (Spoken in New Delhi on March 18, 1939).

The Gita tells us: Whatsoever be the form which a devotee seeks to worship with faith, I (God) make his faith steadfast in that form alone. However men approach me, even so do I accept them, O Arjuna.

All religions are finally true. These semitics waste their time going up and down the earth, arguing. Tsk, tsk.

## VI

What about the saying of Zenophanes, the Greek, who long ago pointed out that men make gods in their own image, those of the Ethiopians being black and snub-nosed, and those of the Thracians having blue eyes and red hairs; and that if oxen or lions had hands and could produce images, they too would represent the gods after their own fashion?

Well, Zenophanes was correct. The monarchists, you know, believe the king to be God's vice-regent on earth. The capitalists, some of them, account a worthy acquisition and stewardship of property, a sign of divine election to salvation. The socialists believe that God loves only the proletariat, and brings down them of high estate. In fact, the man in the street imagines God as a glorified human, with the traits of his own culture. As a man eats, fights, marries and begets children, so does his god eat, fight, marry and beget children. Most of the ceremonies of popular religion in all countries proceed on this principle. Each religion with a human founder imagines God in terms of the founder. So heaven becomes a kind of glorified earth. But, says the Vedantist, as men's minds improve, their conception of God becomes elevated, and these anthropomorphic traits are gradually dropped. By slow degrees, and as one's eyes grow accustomed to the vedantist spectacles, he begins to see God as a spaceless and timeless Being, without any personality whatever. And the gentle pundit at our elbow, instructs us that we are seeing God as He is, and not simply as He is to us. So, while it is correct to say that all religions are absolutely true, it is also correct to say that all are at the same time, absolutely false, because they represent human ways of looking at the Ultimate. As a matter of fact, there is no human way of conceiving Brahman. We should have done with all anthropomorphisms, and reply, 'Neti, neti'; Not this, not that.

## VII

Well, then, what about these human founders of religions? Shall we do away with them, too? They actually existed, didn't they? or did they? Our pundit replies, 'Whether the founders of religions existed or not, has been the subject of considerable debate. Some men have actually devoted their lives to proving that Buddha, Christ, Krishna, Confucius never existed, and the opposite has been defended by other scholars equally persuasive. But, as a matter of fact, it does not matter whether these founders actually lived or did not live. The teacher,

as an historical personage, has but secondary importance. To those who seek spiritual illumination, it is of no moment whether the content of the scriptures had any existence in history. All this rumbling about the historicity of one or the other founder is so much empty thunder without rain. The being supposed to have been the founder was actually identical with the Divine Self, and may be called the Infinite in man, Who was and is the Same. We Vedantists have never attempted to prove the objective reality of our gods, either theologically, historically or critically. After all, no individual is real, not even you or me. Only the One is real. If you try to prove or disprove the reality of our gods, that is a waste of your time. We are not concerned about it'.

## VIII

At this juncture, we move around the *chukkar* or circle of mountain path to the Christian cemetery to the northwest, and count the crosses marking the graves of the British infantry who died of wounds, and the last resting places of the Scotch businessmen who established their branch firms in Southern Asia. They lie buried under the ground, secure in their cement chambers, cold and alone. Will there ever be a resurrection? Will they see again their Atlantic island? Or, are they even now existing, unseen? Do they look down upon our crags, or watch us slip and fall?

By adjusting our Vedantic spectacles to these earthly mounds we perceive the end of our hope for personal immortality. Whoever these dead were, they are finished. Don't think that at the Great Assize their remains can break out of their cement vaults and climb out on top of the ground. Don't suppose some immaterial constituent of their individuality to be able to survive the evidence of what lies before our eyes in this cemetery. The expression of their egos in the outlines of a recognizable human, all that characterised and defined them to their contemporaries, whatever they introspectively felt and hoped and knew of themselvs, all that is annihilated. Whoever we may now be, after death we shall never again be conscious of ourselves. Our energy of spirit will continue as a new and different individuality without any memory whatever. Our identity will perish forever with our lifeless bodies. And it is well, for individuality is the result of ignorance, and separates us from the World Soul.

So much for our preliminary examination of the human situation through the spectacles of a Vedantist. We appear to be in a universe that has no Creator, playing a game of make-believe, deluded by our obtuseness into supposing it to have meaning. There is no absolute standard of right or wrong, and no reality to evil. One religion is as good as another, for each is true. At the same time each religion is false because anthropomorphic. Whether the prophets, seers and incarnations reported in scripture ever walked the surface of the earth is irrelevant, as questions of historicity distract the mind and rob it of spiritually

profitable considerations. Personal immortality is both impossible and undesirable, and ought to be given up once and for all.

These preliminary findings clear the ground of useless doctrinal debris. They also point up the fact that man wastes his time puzzling over non-existent problems. You see, man imagines there are these problems, and thereupon distracts himself by looking for their non-existent solutions. Just as science gives up as hopeless the search for a Creator, so does the Vedanta. Herr du Bois Reymond, one-time director of the Berlin Academy of Sciences, is reported to have said that science has no solution to offer to the following:

1. As to the origin and nature of cosmic matter and force.
2. As to the origin of motion.
3. As to the origin of life.
4. As to the apparently designed order of nature.
5. As to the origin of sensation and consciousness.
6. As to the origin of rational thought and speech.
7. As to the possibility of free will.

To repeat: Science has not found any origin of matter; the Vedanta says there isn't any real matter. Science cannot account for the origin of motion; the Vedanta says there isn't any reality to motion. Science cannot account for the origin of life; the Vedanta says that there is no separate entity such as life. Science cannot account for a seeming design in nature; the Vedanta says there isn't any design; it is all *maya* and so on.

After all these centuries our best scientific minds cannot produce any answers, it must mean that there are no answers; and if no answers, then it is safe to say that there are no problems, except as conjured up in our vain fancy. There are neither answers nor problems pertaining to such, and the whole body of literature dealing with such ignorance may be safely forgotten. It had and has no basis in reality.

In some such fashion, our Neo-Vedantist friend reasons today.

BHARATTAN KUMARAPPA, *The Hindu Conception of the Deity.* (London: Luzac and Co., 1934) pp. 356. Reprinted.

This attractive volume is the author's thesis accepted by the University of London for the Ph.D. degree in the Faculty of Arts.

Here Dr Kumarappa shows that Ramanuja 'repudiates at every turn the doctrine of the illusoriness of the material world and the finite self and postulates that ultimate Reality is one in which the material world and the finite self find a necessary place'. The book consists of two parts. Part one deals with the Pre-Ramanuja concepts of the Deity in the Upanishads, in the Gita, the Pancharatra and Puranic Literature. Each chapter has three subdivisions:

1. The Nature of the Deity,
2. The Relation of the Deity to the world,
3. The Relation of the Deity to the Finite Self.

At the end of each section there is a masterly summary. The second part deals with Ramanuja's conception of the Deity. Here the author shows in a convincing way, that Ramanuja's convictions have arisen out of his deep religious experience. Revelation to this great Hindu saint was not confined to scripture but is admitted as possible to the individual in this own direct experience. This does not mean that Ramanuja rejects reason. The place assigned to reason in matters pertaining to the Deity is that of supporting revealed truths. Of course he holds that scriptures alone are the final authority. But since the scriptures do not give definite and consistent guidance, the truths upon which Ramanuja relies are those which come to him from his own sectarian religion, Vaisnavaism. So, the great Bhakta shows how these convictions of the great saints who have directly experienced God (i.e., Alwars and Acharyas) are not contrary to the scriptures. In other words Ramanuja has arrived through his Vaisnava religion, at the idea of the Deity as a *personal Being* filled with every *perfection* and abounding in love. This idea is shown to be logically reasonable, and not contrary to scriptures.

Dr Kumarappa by this book answers one of the charges brought against the Hindu philosophies that they regard the world of experience, and the world of life and activity as unreal.

The book is at once authoritative and readable. The author guides the reader step by step and quotes profusely from the sources. His reasoning is lucid and his conclusions are valid. We are glad that this book written almost a quarter of a century ago, has been reprinted and is now available in the market.

—R. D. IMMANUEL

## AN OUTLINE OF HINDUISM

Fr Zacharias, O.C.D. (Alwaye: J.M. Press, 1956) pp. 483.

Here is a handbook written expressly for Christian students at the request of the Seminary Commission appointed by the Roman Catholic Apostolic Internuncio to India. According to the author its main purpose is 'to provide earnest and intelligent readers with readable materials and reliable information on the ancient, yet memorable religio-philosophical thought of India as it has developed and has been recorded from the very beginning of history up to our own days following the chronological order of its development'. The author says in his preface: 'This book is intended to be a guide towards a sympathetic understanding of the lofty religio-philosophical conceptions entertained by the Indo-Aryan people in every age and clime. With this object in view we have tried faithfully to present the noble religious Indo-Aryan thought, and at the same time allusions have been made to similar Christian doctrines, not with the object of instituting any unhealthy comparison or controversy but with the sincere desire of extending a helping hand to so many people of good will who earnestly desire to make an intelligent and impartial study of different faiths with which they come into contact'.

In this attempt, the author has succeeded more or less. However, the book has been written at the request of a Roman Catholic Seminary Commission and is intended for seminary students. So the author while showing the distinctive view point of Christianity, (unconsciously we presume) affirms the superiority of Thomistic theology. In all matters connected with religion it would be best to show the real differences between view points, and leave the reader to draw his own conclusions. Apart from this one feature, this book is extremely helpful in many respects. The author has made it a point 'to look up, consult and study many standard works on different subjects', connected with the study of Hinduism. The contents are not merely chapter headings, but they also contain a careful and detailed analysis of the same. The paragraph headings are printed in bold letters. This is a great help to students. Foreign students especially, will find this book to be a mine information, and as such the volume could be used as a text book in foreign countries where Hinduism is taught.

An important bibliography has been appended and this will be of great help to people interested in the study of this subject. But above all, the author has been as objective as possible. In order to do this he quotes profusely from the texts in their contexts and he lets the originals speak for themselves. The print is clear and the price is moderate. We hope many will use it and get a clearer grasp of the many sided facts of Hinduism.

—R. D. Immanuel

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